

2. Background

This section gives an overview of the Delaware River Basin's water resources and other geographic statistics. A brief discussion of the various aspects of the Delaware River Basin Commission's (DRBC) water pollution control program is also provided, including how it relates to some other regulatory entities in the Basin. Finally, a description of some special issues of concern and recommendations for dealing with them is given.

2.1 An Overview of the Delaware River Basin

The Delaware is the longest un-dammed river east of the Mississippi, extending from the confluence of its East and West branches at Hancock, N.Y. to the mouth of the Delaware Bay. 216 tributaries feed the river, the largest being the Schuylkill and Lehigh Rivers in Pennsylvania. In all, the basin contains approximately 13,500 square miles, draining parts of Pennsylvania (50.3 percent of the basin's total land area); New Jersey (23.3%); New York (18.5%); and Delaware (7.9%). See Figure 2.1 for a map of the Basin. Table 2.1 provides geographical statistics for the Delaware River Basin.

Figure 2.1: Delaware River Basin



Source: 2004 DRBC Integrated List

Over 17 million people rely on the waters of the Delaware River Basin for drinking and industrial use and the Delaware Bay is only a day's drive away for about 40 percent of the people living in the United States. Yet the basin drains only four-tenths of one percent of the total continental U.S. land area.

Three reaches of the Delaware River have been included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. One section extends 73 miles from the confluence of the river's East and West branches at Hancock, N.Y. downstream to Milrift, PA; the second is a 40-mile stretch from just south of Port Jervis, NY downstream to the Delaware Water Gap near Stroudsburg, Pa. The Lower Delaware Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, signed into law on November 1, 2000, adds about 65 miles of the Delaware and selected tributaries to the national system, linking the Delaware Water Gap and Washington Crossing, PA, just upstream of Trenton, N.J. Currently, almost the entire non-tidal Delaware River (the portion north of the "fall line" at Trenton, New Jersey) is included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The Maurice River in New Jersey (a Delaware Bay tributary) and the White Clay Creek in Pennsylvania and Delaware (which flows into the Christina River, a tributary to the Delaware) also have been included in the national system.

The Delaware Bay and tidal reach of the Delaware River have been included in the National Estuary Program, a project set up to protect estuarine systems of national significance.

As a result of clean-up efforts in the Delaware River, shad and other fish species are increasing in number. A record number of juvenile shad were netted in the Delaware during 1996, a strong indication of exceptionally good spawning runs when these fish return to the river as adults. A recent study of Delaware River shad fishing placed a \$3.2 million annual value on this fishery alone.

There are other economic benefits from the river. The Port of Philadelphia, for instance, generated \$335 million in business revenue during 1997, according to the Philadelphia Regional Port Authority. State and local taxes from port transactions that year totaled \$13 million and there were 3,622 jobs directly stemming from port activities.

The population of the Delaware River Basin increased by approximately 3.7 percent between 1990 and 2000, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures. Large growth spurts occurred in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountain region and in the Philadelphia suburbs. The Basin's population rose by about 270,000 over the decade with the 1990 figure standing at roughly 7.31 million people. The basin provides water to approximately 10 million people who live outside of its boundaries.

Table 2.1: Delaware River Basin Geographic Statistics (approximate)

Total Basin Land Area (mi ²) ^a	12,700
Population (2000)	7.6 million
Major River Basins (HUC 8) ^b	13
River Miles (Named) ^a	9,080
Border (Shared) River Miles ^a	339
Square Miles of Public Lakes and Reservoirs ^b	140
Square Miles of Estuary/Bay ^b	783
Square Miles of Wetlands ^b	480

^aDRBC GIS files

^bNational Hydrographic Dataset